

11.

LIGHT OVER BYWELL

NARRATOR (contd)

Bywell village grows in stature,

Houses, castles springing forth,
Anvils echoing from the smithies,
Mark the arsenal of the North.

Forests fall before the woodmen,
Ploughs turn furrows in the land,
Anglers' boots and hoofs of cattle,
Mingle with the river's sand.

Yet amid the signs of plenty,
Casting shade on waters clear,
Brooding over both lord and peasant,
Rests an ever present fear.

Fear that makes the old men tremble
Fear that reaches to the cot,
Fear that weighs down hearts in Bywell
Fear of the avenging Scot.

But for children fears are fragile,
Friends more real than threatened foe,
Christmas filled the hearts of youth, who
Lived five hundred years ago.

So return in spirit with us,
See five centuries slip away,
Hear the voices of our kinsmen
Greet the Eve of Christmas Day.

(The Narrator moves back to the Altar.
The choir sings "Here we come a wassaling".
As they sing mediaeval children run down the two naves from
the West door and mime Christmas customs. One group can
bring in branches of fir and arrange them. Two boys can carry
in a yule log and decorate it. Two girls might bring in holly
and distribute it round the pulpit.
All is gaiety and activity.
As the carol ends, the children continue with their work,
talkig as they do so.)

1st BOY I like Christmas.

1st. GIRL So do I.

2nd GIRL Just look at this holly, look at the berries.

ALL O_Oh yes. Isn't it lovely

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- 2nd BOY But look at these green branches! My father cut these from the trees behind the castle.
- 3rd BOY Aren't they grand.
- ALL Beautiful!
- 3rd GIRL And this mistletoe is from the apple tree on the village green.
- 4th BOY You'll be put in the stocks for taking that.
- 3rd BOY And we'll pelt you with eggs.
- 4th GIRL Stop teasing.
- 1st BOY (seriously) Do you think we ought to be here with all these things?
- 1st GIRL Of course we ought. The priest lets us do it every year.
- 2nd BOY People have been doing it in St. Peters for hundreds of years - since before the castle was built.
- 2nd GIRL Since before there were any smithies in Bywell. When it was just a tiny village.
- 1st BOY That's what I mean. All of our mothers and fathers are out getting logs and firewood to keep the fires alight over Christmas in the forges. And we're using wood and kindling.
- 3rd GIRL He's right you know.
- 4th BOY My father says that if the fires go out there won't be any swords or spears made here till after Twelfth Night.
- 4th BOY And if the Scots raid Tynedale, we should be made into haggises.
- 4th GIRL I'm frightened.
- 2nd GIRL When will our fathers be back?
- 13th GIRL I wish they would hurry.
- 3rd GIRL Shall we go and find them?
- 1st BOY What on a dark night like this?
- 2nd BOY We'd be in the river, or Smithy Burn.
- 3rd BOY And the water's cold to-night.
- 4th GIRL I'm frightened!

(A Jester appears, running down the nave, shouting as he comes He is older than the others, a gay reassuring person)

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JESTER Frightened! Frightened on Christmas Eve?

ALL Hurrah! it's the Jester!

JESTER (jumping on left rostrum) Greetings one and all. A Happy Christmas and lots of boar's meat and plum pudding to go with it.

4th GIRL (running to him) I'm glad that you're here Jester.

1st GIRL We were frightened about our fathers -

1st BOY - and our mothers -

2nd GIRL - and the Scots -

2nd BOY - and the darkness -

JESTER (striking a pose and brandishing his bells) Frightened of the Scots? with the Bywell Jester at hand? What nonsense! Why I'd soon fix them.

3rd GIRL What would you do?

JESTER I would take them by the sporran with this hand -so- and then I would (he rings his bells) wring their necks (he leaps to right rostrum)

ALL SILLY!"

JESTER Or else I would tell them riddles. Listen to this one. You all see this lovely nave of St. Peter's?

ALL Yes

JESTER Well, where is the greatest nave in the kingdom?

1st BOY London? (Jester shakes his head)

1st GIRL Hexham? (vigorous shake)

2nd BOY DURHAM? (numerous shakes)

ALL Tell us! Tell us!

JESTER Why here of course. I am the greatest knave in the kingdom, and (bowing)I'm proud of it.

(they advance on the Jester, who dodges and cuffs them
A boy runs in, down the aisle from the West door.)

MESSENGER The Scots! the Scots are in the village!

(the children stop, forming a tableau of terror)

JESTER What say you boy?

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- MESSENGER The Scots . They are in the village. I saw them as they crept in.
- ALL Oh the Scots ! We are lost. We shall be killed!
(they cling together)
- JESTER Quiet! Now calm down my chickens. This is Christmas Eve Christ only had a stable from which to face the world. We have a strong church. You must do as I tell you. John, to the West door and bar it. (John runs down the aisle). Mark, quick to the top of the tower and keep watch. (Mark runs down the aisle). Matthew, the bell. Go quickly and ring Peter our trusty bell to bring back the men of Bywell. (Matthew runs down the aisle)
Now my brave followers, I am your lord to-night, and I command you to obey me. Each of you go quickly and fetch a candle (six children run to the vestry and return with candles). Now we will douse the lights (the church lights go out). I will sit on my throne as befits a lord Jester. (he sits on the chair,) and you my nightingales will sing to me. Now what shall it be?
(various suggestions, above which comes a girl's voice:-)
- 1st GIRL Holy Night.
- ALL Oh yes!
- JESTER So let it be. And God grant that it will be.
(the children group with their candles. To organ accompaniment they sing Holy Night. The church bell starts to toll. As the hymn ends Mark runs down the aisle)
- MARK The Scots are just outside. They've set fire to the village - it's on flames.
- JESTER How close are they?
- MARK They're at the West door. I could hear them talking, and sharpening their spears on the stone.
- JESTER But the door held?
- MARK Oh yes the bars are in their sockets.
- 1st GIRL I wish our fathers would come.
- JESTER Back to your post Mark. Your fathers will be here shortly, my warriors. But meanwhile, as your lord and master, I need entertaining. Mary! where is Mary?
- MARY Here Oh lord Jester.
- JESTER Have you your recorder Mistress Mary?
- MARY I have sire.
- JESTER In that case you are hereby appointed court musician. I crave music, sweet music; music that can drown the cater-

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JESTER (cont'd) -wauling of the bagpipes. Come my doves, gather round and let the balm of Greensleeves pacify your fears.
 (Mary plays Greensleeves on a recorder while the children sit on the floor, listening or humming. As the tune ends, Mark runs back up the aisle. The bells cease)

MARK They're going! They're going! The Scots are running away!

ALL Hurrah! Tell us about it Mark.

MARK They were hammering away at the door, when suddenly I heard them shout and yell and call to each other, and then they ran off down through the churchyard towards the river.

JESTER (rising) God be praised. Ho there my subjects! Lights!
 (the lights go on again)
 Now off with you, and do what you can to put out the fires. Quick, or I'll have you all in the stocks.
 (They hurry out laughing, leaving the Jester and Mark)
 A queer thing indeed. That the Scots should run like that. An act of God? An answer to our prayers? I wonder --
 (There is a knocking at the West door, then three shepherds advance up the aisle towards the acting area).

JESTER Why shepherds, right welcome you are here. But what brings you from the fells to-night? I thought you would have been by your hearths.

1st SHEPHERD It was the light of the fires, good Jester

2nd SHEPHERD We saw the light over Bywell, and guessed it must be a Scottish raid.

3rd SHEPHERD So we made all haste here, driving our sheep before us.

MARK DRIVING YOUR SHEEP?

1st SHEPHERD We have no swords.

2nd SHEPHERD There were only three of us.

3rd SHEPHERD But we had our sheep!

JESTER I see, so you drove your sheep right into Bywell.

1st SHEPHERD Right among the Scots, shouting our heads off as we did so.

2nd SHEPHERD And in the darkness they must have thought the beasts were demons or spirits ---

3rd SHEPHERD - And they ran off as fast as their kilts would let them.

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- JESTER To drown their fears in the Tyne! Well done shepherds
We shall be fishing for sporrans on Christmas Day.
- 1st SHEPHERD But we must go and find our four-footed demons.
 (He goes out, back up the South nave)
- 2nd SHEPHERD Then there are the fires to be put out in the village

 (He exits up centre nave)
- 3rd SHEPHERD And all to be done before our service at mid-night
This will be a busy Christmas Eve.

 (He exits up south nave)
- MARK Hasn't it been exciting?
- JESTER Aye exciting lad, but curious too I'm just a jester
a foolish knave whose craft is making solemn faces gay.
But things lie too deep for laughter. Our Christmas
will be merry now, but I shall ponder, as the punch
bowl flows, on that first Christmas, and how clear
its message has been made to me.

 (organ music swells as the Jester places his hand
on Mark's shoulder, and they go out up the nave.)
- COMMENTATOR The music dies and the Commentator speaks from the
 pulpit)
"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding
in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by
night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them
and the glory of the Lord shone round about them:
and they were sore afraid. And the Angel said unto
them "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings
of great joy, which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day in the city of David
a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. And this shall
be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the Babe, wrapped
in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of
the Heavenly Host praising God, and saying ' Glory
to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will
toward men'.
And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from
them into heaven the shepherds said one to another,
'Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing
which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known
to us'
And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph
and the Babe lying in a manger."
 (The choir sings "The Holly and the Ivy". The lights
then go out, except those over the acting area.
The Narrator speaks:-)